11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

THE PHENOMENA OF AMHARA ORALITY

155 826 [856] [192] Shortly after an Amhara child is born some butter is placed in his mouth. This is done in the belief that it will keep his voice from becoming harsh. From that moment on, the mouth never ceases to be an organ of extraordinary importance in his life. Its cultural importance is reflected in the attention given to it in the Amharic vocabulary: Baeteman's *Dictionnaire Amarigna-Français* lists some sixty idioms built with the Amharic word for mouth, *af*, more than are listed for any other words in the language except "eye," "heart," and "earth."[4] The organ is publicly celebrated in such proverbs as: "Cleverness of mouth, to the master; cleverness of hand, to the slave."

[539] 155 826 171 The oral zone is of course of universal significance. Some items of oral imagery probably appear in most languages, and manifestations of oral libido appear in many forms familiar to Westerners: the French love for gourmandism, the German passion for beer-drinking and singing, the American addiction to cigarettes, chewing gum, and "life-savers." Many of the less familiar phenomena to be related below in describing Amhara orality, moreover, are found in most of the cultures of Africa and the Middle East. But such phenomena often appear inconspicuously alongside other culturally patterned impulses and sublimations stemming from other phases of psychosexual development. What may distinguish the Amhara—and doubtless some other cultures—is the extent to which the oral zone is an object of attention and a source of behavioral modes and expressive symbolism. The Amhara, it appears, have a preoccupation with orality.

121 155 This preoccupation is manifest in three different kinds of phenomena. There are, first of all, aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong positive attachment to the infantile experience of sucking, in pure and in numerous sublimated forms. These we shall designate as the phenomena of *oral erotism*. Second, there are the aspects of Amhara culture which express a [152] strong positive attachment to the oral zone as a center for various aggressive activities—the modes which Erikson calls "incorporation by biting," "oral retention," and "oral intrusion." These we shall collectively designate as the phenomena of *oral sadism*. Finally, there are phenomena which express a conflict about the gratification of many of these oral desires; and these we shall refer to as the phenomena of *oral ambivalence*.

Oral Erotism

155 853 Feeding at the breast is a prominent and beloved experience in Amhara life. The Amhara infant is suckled whenever he wishes, at the slightest show of desire. Since he is rarely separated from his mother it is easy for him to satisfy himself at any time of day or night. Popular beliefs about breast-feed-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

ing support this permissiveness. If a baby is not suckled whenever he wishes to be, it is believed that he will become sick or will not grow strong, and the negligent mother is looked on as one of evil character.

Not only is the infant's desire to suck freely indulged, but it is indulged for a fairly long time. The normal period for breast-feeding is two to three years. Only if a new sibling happens on the scene is weaning deliberately effected. If another child is not forthcoming, and the mother is not ill, there is no inclination at any time to deny the child the breast. In many cases nursing continues until the child is four or five, when his work obligations begin to interfere.

The attitude of oral permissiveness is manifest in other ways. Thumb-sucking is accepted with good humor, and when a baby is in a bad mood he may be given his father's or mother's thumb to use as a pacifier. Though Amhara are otherwise very modest, mothers do not hesitate to offer the breast no matter where they happen to be. When referring to the process of breast-feeding, Amhara males invariably cup one hand under an imaginary breast to depict this common and natural event. When speaking to persuade a guest to accept a second glass of beer, the Amhara host has recourse to the formula: "But your mother's breasts are two!" Another indication that breast-feeding is a very familiar part of the Amhara's social environment is that in interpreting the TAT cards, a number of respondents interpreted some scene with children as a situation of breast-feeding, although this was not depicted on any of the cards.

The emotional context of breast-feeding is more significant than the physical pleasures involved. Until he leaves the breast the Amhara child inhabits an emotional paradise. He receives much attention and is fondled by both parents and by other relatives. He remains close to his mother at all times, sleeping alongside her at night and spending the day near her when not tied in a bundle on her back. He accompanies her thus to visit relatives, attend market, or go to church. Only when the mother goes to fetch water is he separated from her, for there is not room for both baby and water jug on the mother's back, and besides, water holes are the abodes of evil spirits who may try to make the child sick.

After he is weaned, the Amhara child enters a much harsher emotional atmosphere. He must adjust to a regime of commands, responsibilities, and punishments. He is nostalgic forever after for the warmth and security of his earliest years, a condition vividly associated with the experience of sucking at the breast. The prominence in Amhara culture of this association of emotional security with breast-feeding is shown by such phenomena as the mammary symbolism of the rooftop and the institution known as the "breast-father." The former consists of a clay ornament, whose color and shape clearly replicate the female nipple, which is placed atop the breast-like conical roof which

chases more exotic ingredients from an herbalist (in this transaction, acting as medhaniyt korac) who is known to treat the relevant ailment. Medicaments are mixed with the tokwariy's ink for all instances of therapeutic tattooing. The decision to include medicaments in prophylactic tattooing reflects the tokwariy's alternative strategies. In the first of these, the tattooing aims to drive away the pathogenic agent, by a combination of designs. These designs are associated with the pathogen in "conventional" or pragmatic terms only; the medicaments used in tattooing are derived from herbalist therapies in which the medicament assisted in expelling the pathogen from the sickman. The second strategy is directed against purposive agents, those responsible for yisew ayn and yibuda basiyta (discussed in chapter one). Here no medicaments are used, and the designs aim to distract the agent's attention and his disease-causing eye from vulnerable areas of the potential victim's body, particularly away from his mouth. Children under ten are rarely tattooed, but are protected from these agents by bizarre haircuts (for example, three asymmetrically arranged patches of hair on an otherwise shaven skull, or a single patch on the brow), likewise intended to draw attention to less vulnerable body areas.

A variety of motifs are utilized by the tokwariy, necklaces of "beads", geometric decorations, crosses, and

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

APPENDIX B

HERBALIST THERAPY FOR YIBUDA BAŠIYTA (BUDA POSSESSION)

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[825] The buda is a human, male or female, who shares a kinship of sorts with the hyena. When at night he hears their calls, he is irresistably attracted to run about with them. Like the hyena, he strongly desires to eat of human flesh and blood, but his cravings are not malevolent, and he often regrets this compulsion. The buda trait is most often passed down within families; in Begemder Province, it is limited to Falasha families.[52]

[856] The buda trait is present at birth, but like an individual's other capacities, reaches full potency at its bearer's physical maturity.

[302] In his nocturnal guise, the buda bears his human face upon a hyena's body. The first time an individual runs with the hyenas, he (or she) is obliged to cut his hair short, in the fashion of Falasha women; the subsequent transition from wer-hyena form to human appearance is accomplished on the following morning with the aid of a secret medicine. The buda is, however, most dangerous, when in his prosaic human form, he produces the buda syn-

[52] Elsewhere in Ethiopia, buda accusations are directed against local endogamous iron working peoples.